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## Feature

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### Soft Power, Dark Power and Academic Co-operation

By David Lane

Academic judgment provides a context in which events are interpreted and it influences public opinion, either directly or indirectly, through the media. Ideally, academia should contribute to the building of a body of informed knowledge. The current reality is that Russia in the West is perceived through two political lenses: in the right eye, it is conditioned by Western 'soft power' and in the left eye by the West's 'dark power'.

#### Capturing the Academic Field

Capturing the academic field with respect to the interpretation of post-communist countries is one of the tasks of Western 'soft power'. Soft power seeks to extend a state's authority by virtue of its culture, values and way of life – as opposed to the use of

military force and political coercion. The notion of 'soft power' utilised by American academics / political advisers, such as Joseph Nye, is both descriptive and prescriptive; not only does it describe Western values and ways of doing things but concurrently it claims that other people should adopt them.



ВДНХ, USSR Exhibition of National Economic Achievements, Moscow (photo by Diana Turner)

Western soft power captures the academic imagination in terms of American values: the consumer entertainment society, electoral democracy, free markets, private property, free media and individual rights; such a competitive individualistic society gives people what they think they deserve. In showing how foreign countries fall short of Western soft power criteria, it defines a political agenda of research on foreign countries. In this context research sponsored by institutions such as Freedom House evaluates how countries perform on their indexes of political freedom and competitive markets. States that fall short are unfree and undemocratic. Such 'policy based evidence' influences politicians, as well as public opinion, and legitimates policies that call for change.

While this approach in endorsing Western institutions is relatively benign, many analysts go further and develop a form of 'dark power' that discredits and delegitimizes foreign adversaries. The objective here is to highlight developments in other countries that challenge Western presuppositions. Unmasking deviations from these norms constitutes the West's 'dark power'.

So successful has been the ideological offensive that Russia is widely perceived as the demon in international affairs – a victory for the West's 'dark power'.

## Russia's 'Soft' Power

Russia has failed to find a Western audience for its own ideological and political position. Even such a prominent Russian commentator as Political Fund President Vyacheslav Nikonov opined that his country had "nothing to offer ideologically", when interviewed in 2006. However, more recently statements by Konstantin Kosachev and President Putin have suggested that Russia projects its traditional values as a counter image to the West. Writing in 2012, Kosachev defined these as: "...civilisational values rooted in traditions, religion and basic ethic[al] norms (respect for the elders, help to one's neighbor, family, honor, dignity and love for the homeland)". Such values are very general and would be accepted by many in non-Russian societies.

Concurrently, the positive appeal of Russia to British academia relies on its cultural heritage: Pushkin rather than Putin; Russian music, literature and art rather than politics, international affairs and economics. Russia as a civilisation has become the major appeal, embedded in history and religion, and bypassing the Soviet period. Russia (unlike the Soviet Union) is never considered as a political and economic system worthy of emulation or even serious discussion. Study of the Russian language has experienced a steep fall. Russia as a sphere of political interest has moved to the periphery and its place has been taken by China. This may (or may not) be a matter of

concern, but it illustrates the fact that China has succeeded in projecting a more positive image of itself than Russia. It has been more successful in its soft power policy.

Post-Soviet Russia has been put on the defensive not only by the West's soft and dark power offensives but by the effects of its headlong rush to embrace neo-liberal policies, compounded by an illegitimate redistribution of property. There are unacceptable inequalities in wealth and income distribution; business practices and electoral procedures involve corruption; the economy is lacking both in investment and innovation.

However, some positive features have arisen under the Putin and Medvedev administrations. One is the idea of national sovereignty. This entails taking control over national assets to the benefit of national stakeholders; an outlook that seeks to curb the power of transnational (and national) companies and hegemonic countries. Such ideas are potentially an alternative ideology to neo-liberalism, but scarcely recognised in Western academia. In the context of globalisation politics, such positions may be counter-posed to the dominant approach of neo-liberalism and have a considerable rapport in academia in the West.

Russia's policy of multilateralism, the evolution of regional associations, the concept of Eurasianism and Russia's links with China (and the BRICS) are undeveloped as challenges to Western hegemony. Here again, positive state policies countering the effects of the global recession, as well as critiques of the institutions that have caused them, would find positive interest – if not an affirmative response. While Russia's 'respect for international law' has been questioned, following the incorporation of the Crimea into Russia, its foreign policy has been far less interventionist than the practices of Western states.

Western states have successfully projected their soft power and hidden their dark side. In contrast, Russia's soft power has been obscured by a concentration on the West's

dark side. The English-language TV channel RT has countered Western positions by using Western academics as a vehicle for Russian 'dark power' to expose the West's duplicity. However, RT has not succeeded in projecting a convincing soft power image of post-communist Russia. This is a reflection of the leadership's emphasis on debunking the West, rather than extolling Russia's virtues. For example, President Putin's Valdai speech of 25 October 2014 was strong as a critique of US foreign policy (a 'dark power' scenario) but failed to advance Russia's soft power image. In comparison, China's 'Beijing consensus' is much more successful.

## **Ways to Promote More Academic Co-operation**

To promote more positive participation by British academics in the study of Russia, initiatives might come from Western civil society associations, such as the SCRSS. However, the major impetus must come from within Russia itself. An analogy here is with Western soft power sponsorship. The British Council plays a major part in projecting British values abroad and might be a model to emulate.

A Russian-type British Council could involve bilateral arrangements with foreign countries to promote the interchange of students and academics, and lecture tours by specialists; it could have a news digest website, and email and social media circulation to members; it could promote special events such as film festivals, celebrate contemporary Russian authors and support language courses.

The UK has a positive reputation abroad and some of this is due to the proselytising efforts of the British Council. In 2010 its budget was fifty times that of the Russkiy Mir Foundation, illustrating the low priority given to soft power promotion by Russia. China is very ambitious and entrepreneurial in this respect. It has sponsored twenty-five Confucius Institutes in the UK (and 440 worldwide).

Taking a cue from the USA, where such soft power centres are financed by philanthropists, the many Russian oligarchs living abroad might provide a source of finance for similar developments. Ukrainian oligarch Dmitry Firtash's modest \$8.7 million donation to Cambridge University was used quite successfully to promote Ukrainian studies. By comparison, Roman Abramovich spent \$129 million on just two footballers' transfer fees (Shevchenko and Torres) – such a sum would transform the study of Russia in the UK.

At present Russia falls woefully behind Western states in attracting foreign students, who usually form a positive impression of their host country. The United States and Britain top the scales with 18 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively, of the total number of foreign students (data for 2009, OECD). Russia attracts only four per cent. Scholarships with stipends are also rather meagre and not comparable even to other post-socialist states; for example, in 2012 Poland offered 2,000 scholarships to Ukrainians, whereas Russia gave only 200. This is hardly indicative of a country that seeks to develop a positive image abroad.

## **Soft Power Should Reflect Reality**

Clearly, adopting the measures I suggest would not create an attractive image of Russia overnight, as this image is also shaped by the mass media. However, they would significantly improve the knowledge of those people abroad with an interest in Russia – and could give rise to higher levels of objectivity.

Nonetheless, improvements in links with academia form only one part of a policy to promote a more positive representation of Russia. What underpins any kind of soft power promotion is the sort of place Russia is thought to be. Its character shapes the image that it can project of itself. 'Soft power' is valid and desirable as a form of co-operation, rather than force, but it must have some content. Here Russia is faced with a challenge. The present leadership's emphasis on 'traditional values' does not

address the character of contemporary Russia, but relies on an image of pre-1917 Imperial Russia. Unlike the Soviet Union (and the contemporary USA), which had a clear understanding of what it was and wanted to be, Russia has not developed a focused and coherent ideological and political image. This is not just a problem of 'image making', but one of forming a social and political character on which an image may be created. Hence Russia has experienced an inherent deficiency in its attempts at soft power promotion.

*David Lane is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and Emeritus Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge University. He is also a Vice-President of the SCRSS.*

## **SCRSS News**

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### **Annual General Meeting**

Notice is hereby given that the AGM of the Society for Co-operation in Russian and Soviet Studies will take place at 11.00am on **Saturday 16 May 2015** at the Society's premises at 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB. The meeting is open to SCRSS members only. The deadline for motions and nominations of members for election to the next Council of the Society is **Friday 24 April 2015**. All motions and nominations must be seconded by another SCRSS member. The agenda for the AGM will be available from early May.

### **SCRSS Chair**

Following the completion of his work on the Library Project (see below), John Riley has now resumed his role as Chair of the SCRSS. His temporary replacement in the role, Fiona Wright, continues as a member of the Executive Committee and Council of the Society. We were delighted to welcome Fiona to the December party and members will be pleased to know that she continues to remain positive and enthusiastic despite her ongoing health issues.

## **Library Project and Strategy Development**

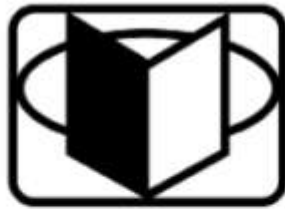
The one-year funded library project, undertaken by John Riley as library project manager, was signed off by the SCRSS Council in September 2014. The completed work focused on a thorough assessment of the library collections and implementation of some 'quick wins', in particular de-acquisition of duplicates and re-location of some individual collections within the building. Attention has now moved to the next steps needed to develop a strategy for the future of the SCRSS Library, based on the many issues raised by the completed project and its key report, *SCRSS Library and Archive: Formal Statement*.

To this end, the Council held a special workshop in January 2015 devoted to the SCRSS Library, with participation from our library staff member and library volunteers. The meeting developed a 'vision statement' for the library and looked at a range of proposals to secure its long-term future. The AGM on 16 May will be an opportunity for members to find out more on progress. Finance remains a key issue, but the Society would also welcome more members to volunteer in the library, particularly those with previous library experience and knowledge of the Russian language.

Please contact the Hon Secretary if you would be interested in making a financial donation to support the library or in volunteering.

### **Public Diplomacy Conference**

In October 2014 the SCRSS and SPAIC jointly organised a conference on *The Role of Public Diplomacy in Fostering Russian-British Relations*. See page 8 for a detailed conference report. The feedback from speakers and attendees has been overwhelmingly positive and, especially in the light of current events, shows the importance of maintaining links and people-to-people contacts even when there are difficulties at higher levels.



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## Exhibition Launch

The Mayor of Southwark and a large delegation from St Petersburg were at the SCRSS in October 2014 for the launch of the *London–St Petersburg: City and People* photo exhibition. Working with our partners at the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation (SPAIC), the SCRSS was the first to display the joint work of two photographers, Vaughan Melzer and Nadezhda Anfalova. Both had photographed and interviewed various citizens of the two cities, asking each: "What does Britain mean to you?" and "What does Russia mean to you?" The portraits and fascinating responses from teachers, medics, politicians, police officers, bus drivers, students, among others, were matched together in the exhibition. The photographers and several of the subjects from both cities were present at the launch.



Vaughan Melzer and Nadezhda Anfalova at the exhibition launch (photo by Karl Weiss)

## Round-up of Other Events

In October the Society hosted a lecture by Dr Tim Bowers of the Royal Academy of Music on *Alan Bush and Nationalism in Music*. Tim touched upon a wide range of our former vice-president's writing and compositions, and his relations with other musicians, particularly from the USSR.

In November Professor Stephen Ward joined SCRSS Council members John Riley, Christine Lindsey and Andrew Jameson as a speaker at the 3<sup>rd</sup> SCRSS Russian History

Seminar, focusing on The Thaw. Professor Ward discussed the Society's role over several decades in bringing together British and Soviet town planners and architects, an association reflected in the SCRSS Library's Architecture Collection.

In December the SCRSS held a party and fundraiser to mark the end of our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. The Mayor of Southwark joined us again, while the Mayor of Lambeth arrived in time to draw the raffle and to see his portrait in the *London–St Petersburg: City and People* photo exhibition. He also met another of the subjects, Arctic Convoy veteran Stanley Ballard. Over £600 was raised for SCRSS funds and the party proved a great way to end a very busy year.

## Russian Language Seminar

Although the SCRSS Russian Language Seminar will not take place in April as usual, the Society intends to host it later in the year. Discussions are ongoing with our partners in St Petersburg and details will appear on the SCRSS website as soon as available. Please contact the Hon Secretary to register your interest or to volunteer to help with administering the course.

## Nataliya Eliseeva (1927–2015)

The Society was saddened to learn of the death of Nataliya Grigor'evna Eliseeva, President of the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation (SPAIC). Nataliya was a guiding light for SPAIC over many years, and worked constantly for good international relations with Britain and other foreign countries. We extend our sincere condolences to SPAIC.

*Margarita Mudrak, Chair of SPAIC writes:*

"It is with great regret that we learned that Nataliya Grigor'evna had passed away. She was a true and very dear friend to us all, one who would listen and advise us as both a colleague and friend. Nataliya was born in 1927 and graduated from the Leningrad Textile Institute. She then worked at the

Rabochy Factory, was head of the Nevsky District Committee of the CPSU for more than ten years and Vice-Chair of Leningrad City Council for twelve years. She made a significant contribution to the economic, industrial, social and cultural life of our city. Nataliya devoted more than twenty-five years to international co-operation as head of the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies in Leningrad and, after 1992, the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation. She commanded great respect in our city, in Russia and abroad. She received numerous awards from Russian state and voluntary organisations for her work, as well as international medals and decorations.”

## Next Events

**Thursday 5 March, 2–4pm**

**Event: First Thursday Russian Language Discussion Club**

Informal discussion group for non-native Russian-speaking members of the SCRSS to practise their spoken Russian. You can drop in on the day, but it helps us with planning if you confirm attendance in advance. Fee: £2.00 per member to cover tea and biscuits. *Note: Open to SCRSS members only.*

**Friday 27 March, 7pm**

**Lecture: Dr Michael Jones on *After Hitler: The Last Days of World War Two in Europe***

Historian Michael Jones discusses his new book *After Hitler*, published in January 2015 by John Murray. See Dr Jones’s article on page 11 for more information on the book’s subject matter. Michael Jones is an exceptionally engaging speaker, popular with SCRSS audiences, so put this date in your diaries now! Normal entrance fees apply (members £3.00 / non-members £5.00). *Note: This is a joint SCRSS - Soviet Memorial Trust Fund event.*

**Thursday 2 April, 2–4pm**

**Event: First Thursday Russian Language Discussion Club**

For details, see entry for 5 March.

**Saturday 16 May, 11am**

**Event: SCRSS Annual General Meeting**

See the AGM notice on page 4. *Note: Open to SCRSS members only.*

*Events take place at the SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB, unless otherwise stated. Admission fees: films and lectures £3.00 (SCRSS members), £5.00 (non-members); other events: as indicated. Up-to-date details for all events are available on the SCRSS website at [www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm](http://www.scrss.org.uk/cinemaevents.htm). Please note: dogs are not permitted on SCRSS premises, with the exception of guide dogs.*

## Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News

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### Remembrance Sunday 2014

Over 130 people gathered at the Soviet War Memorial to mark Remembrance Sunday. The Mayor of Southwark was joined by diplomats from a number of CIS countries, the Rt Hon Simon Hughes MP, representatives from Southwark Council, as well as Arctic Convoy veterans and representatives from a wide range of organisations. For the full text of the Russian Ambassador’s address and photographs, see the Russian Embassy website.

### Ushakov Medal Presentations

The Russian Embassy continues to host and organise ceremonies in London and around the UK to present the Ushakov Medal to several thousand Arctic Convoy veterans. For details of all the ceremonies, see the Russian Embassy website.

### Holocaust Memorial Day

On 27 January 2015 the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau attracted widespread coverage in the international media. This was also reflected in the number of camera

crews covering the event at the Soviet War Memorial and Southwark's Holocaust Memorial Tree, which stand next to each other near the Imperial War Museum. A commemoration inside the museum was followed by a wreath-laying ceremony outside, which attracted several hundred people. For coverage of the event, see the LondonSE1 local news website ([london-se1.co.uk/news/view/8061](http://london-se1.co.uk/news/view/8061)) and the Russian Embassy website ([rusemb.org.uk/activity/273](http://rusemb.org.uk/activity/273)).

## Next Events

**Saturday 9 May, 11am**

**Event: Victory Day, 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

The Soviet War Memorial will be the focus of events to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Allied victory over Fascism. Further details about this and other related events will be available closer to the date. To receive regular information about this and other SMTF events, please contact the Hon Secretary, SMTF, c/o 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB or email [smtf@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:smtf@hotmail.co.uk).

*The Soviet War Memorial, dedicated to the 27 million Soviet men, women and children who lost their lives during the fight against Fascism in 1941–45, is located in Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park adjacent to the Imperial War Museum in London.*

## Conference Report

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**‘The Role of Public Diplomacy in Fostering Russian–British Relations’, Rossotrudnichestvo, London, 28 October 2014**

By Kate Clark

Public diplomacy – people involved in organisations working to foster good relations between countries – is of increasing importance at the present time, when the words ‘a new Cold War’ are being

heard and armed conflict has once again arisen in Europe. This was the message of an important conference in London last October, organised jointly by the SCRSS and the St Petersburg Association for International Cooperation (SPAIC).

The conference explored what public diplomacy means in the current context, through four themed sessions. Organisations such as the SCRSS, which was set up to promote better understanding of and cultural co-operation with the USSR (and latterly Russia), as well as other friendship societies both in Britain and in Russia, have always engaged in public diplomacy: the tireless, voluntary work of citizens to improve relations between our two countries.

In *Session 1: Russian–British Co-operation*, Tatiana Emelianova of SPAIC related the history of non-governmental links between our countries and pointed out that public diplomacy had often been the sole channel during much of the Cold War period. It was encouraging to hear speakers, such as Catherine Danks of the Manchester–St Petersburg Friendship Society, tell the Conference about the work their organisations do. Manchester had a proud history of links at political party, trade union and council level over many years, she said, ever since the famous ‘Hands off Russia’ campaign, which had its headquarters in Manchester. But the £170m cut in the City Council's budget in 2011–13, followed by a further £80m since then, had affected the twinning programme between St Petersburg and Manchester. Elizabeth Clark, a trustee of the St Petersburg Forum, spoke of the hospices and cancer daycare centre her organisation had set up in St Petersburg, and its work with local orphanages. Sixty Russian students and teachers had benefited from competitions to travel to Scotland and learn about Scottish culture. Helen Morrison, also a trustee of the St Petersburg Forum and coordinator of the Overseas Literature Competition for the Robert Burns World Federation, praised the wonderful essays Russian students had produced on the Scottish poet.



In *Session 2: Academic Exchanges*, Elena Gorbashko from St Petersburg State University of Economics gave the Conference an insight into her University's work. Elena Vasileva of the Baltic Tourism and Business Academy talked about co-operation between St Petersburg and British universities in the current knowledge-based economy, where globalisation and new computer networking had changed the rules. David Lane of Cambridge University gave a most interesting talk on soft power, dark power and academic co-operation (see page 1 for a full-length article by Dr Lane on this topic). English-language teacher Janet Stanbury gave a lively talk about her work and the techniques she employs in her teaching in St Petersburg, while Richard Oldham of the English-Speaking Union (ESU), established in 1918, spoke of co-operation between schools in Britain and Russia.

In *Session 3: International Diplomacy*, Lord Alan Watson, ESU Vice-President, argued that there was insufficient dialogue between our two countries, evidenced by the recent EU sanctions and Russian import bans. A conference on oil and gas should be held, he said, in view of the changing role of oil now that the USA had huge fracking reserves. Vadim Golubev of St Petersburg State University's Journalism Faculty said that the media was a force in public diplomacy and that citizens engaged in such work could create a positive image of both countries. 2014's Year of Culture, supported by the Russian Government, was an example of good public diplomacy. Student Artyom Feklushin spoke of the prejudices and stereotypes still alive twenty years after the end of the Cold War, and the importance of organisations such as ours to break down barriers. SPAIC Chair Margarita Mudrak spoke of the difficulties in bringing their delegation to the UK, since they had no state support. "Governments alone cannot cope with today's challenges," she said. New approaches and more young people were needed in public diplomacy. Soviet Memorial Trust Fund Chair, Philip Matthews, told the Conference about the origins of the Soviet War Memorial in London. He paid tribute to the many Red

Army soldiers imprisoned and ill treated by the Nazis during World War II, including 400 captives worked to death in occupied Jersey. At last the British Government had recognised the work of the Arctic convoys and awarded medals to the British seamen who risked their lives to take supplies to beleaguered Russia in World War II.

In *Session 4: Cultural Co-operation*, SCRSS Council member Andrew Jameson spoke of the SCRSS's impressive history, aims and activities. There were also lively contributions from Olga Balakleets of Ensemble Productions, Olga Arkhipova of the State Hermitage Museum, Katya Galitzine of the Galitzine–St Petersburg Trust and Tatiana Ivanova of the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia.

*Kate Clark is a member of the Executive Committee of the SCRSS.*

## Feature

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### Opening Our Eyes: The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry

By Robert Chandler

*Robert Chandler writes about a new anthology he has co-edited for Penguin Classics and about Olga Berggolts, one of the poets represented in it.*

There is a need for a new anthology of Russian poetry in translation. Nineteenth-century Russian poetry remains a closed book to the English and American reader. Tyutchev and Fet are barely known even by name; Lermontov is recognised only as a prose writer; and people carry on lazily repeating that Pushkin is untranslatable (in spite of the late Stanley Mitchell's outstanding recent *Eugene Onegin*). As for the twentieth century, the idea that there are four great Russian poets of the era – Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Pasternak and Tsvetaeva – has gone too long unquestioned. There is a pleasing symmetry

about this picture of Russian poetry being represented by two men and two women – two from Moscow and two from St Petersburg; two who survived the Stalin era and two who died young – but this should not lead us to think that they are the only poets worth listening to.



Olga Berggolts, 1941 (SCRSS Library)

Olga Berggolts (1910–75) is a poet I had myself neglected until I began work on this anthology. She has a distinctive voice and she did her best to write honestly about one of the most terrible chapters of the war – the Blockade of Leningrad. Although, as a writer and Party member, she could have been evacuated to Central Asia, she chose to remain in Leningrad throughout the 872 days of the blockade, speaking almost daily on the radio. Her broadcasts – both news items and her own poems – were important to those trapped in the city and she became known as the ‘Voice of the Blockade’. According to Yakov Druskin, a Leningrad poet and translator, it was her straightforwardness that won people’s hearts: “It was as if the woman from next door had happened to get into the Smolny [the Party headquarters], hear the latest news and was now sharing it not with the entire city but with the other people in her own apartment.”<sup>1</sup> Her best poems are equally straightforward. In one she writes of the tin swallow she wore on her lapel, a sign that she was waiting for a letter: “we understood that only a plane, / only a bird,

could reach Leningrad / from the Motherland we loved.” And her *February Diary*, written after the death of her second husband, begins:

It was a day like any other.  
A woman-friend of mine called round.  
Without a tear she told me she’d  
just buried her one friend.  
We sat in silence till the morning.  
What words were there to say to her?  
I’m a Leningrad widow too.

Berggolts was one of the few writers to stay in contact with Akhmatova after the official attacks on her in August 1946, but she felt ashamed about not being still more courageous. Alcoholic in her last years, she died in 1975 of cirrhosis of the liver. Though her death was little reported, thousands attended her funeral. Like the funerals of Pasternak and Akhmatova – though on a smaller scale – this was a show of true feeling, a spontaneous demonstration the authorities were unable to stifle.

\*

We pronounced  
the simplest, poorest words  
as if they had never been said.  
We were saying  
*sun, light, grass*  
as people pronounce  
*life, love, strength.*

Remember how we cleared  
that eternal, accursed glacier  
from the city streets – and an old man  
stamped his foot against the pavement,  
shouting, ‘Asphalt, friends, asphalt!’

As if he were a sailor long ago,  
calling out, ‘Land, land!’

(1945) tr. Robert Chandler

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Yakov Druskin is quoted in Lev Druskin, *Spasennaia kniga: Vospominaniia leningradskogo poeta* (London, OPI, 1984; Web: [http://modernlib.ru/books/druskin\\_lev/spasennaya\\_kniga\\_vospominaniya\\_leningradskogo\\_poeta/read](http://modernlib.ru/books/druskin_lev/spasennaya_kniga_vospominaniya_leningradskogo_poeta/read))

*The 'Penguin Book of Russian Poetry', edited by Robert Chandler, Boris Dralyuk and Irina Mashinski, is published on 26 February 2015 (ISBN: 9780141198309, Pbk, 592pp). Robert Chandler is also editor of 'Russian Short Stories from Pushkin to Buida' and 'Russian Magic Tales from Pushkin to Platonov'. He is a Vice-President of the SCRSS.*

## Feature

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### A Tale of Two VE Days

By Michael Jones

In May 2015 we celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day, Victory Day in Europe. For many, amongst the Allied armed forces and the civilians who supported the war effort, it is a last opportunity to connect with a vitally important achievement – the overthrow of Hitler and the Nazi regime. We remember those who sacrificed their lives so that we might see this day. All of us are in their debt.

In the West we commemorate VE Day on 8 May. In the East – Russia, the other former Soviet Socialist Republics and Serbia – it is remembered on 9 May. These two days evoke a common cause, the Grand Alliance of the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union that fought side by side in the Second World War from 1941–45 and together destroyed the Nazi menace. Many nations fought against Hitler's Germany, but the mighty coalition of America, Britain and Russia was the reason that terrible war was won. And when we consider the price of that victory, the Soviet Union made the greatest blood sacrifice – 27 million of its soldiers and civilians – as it fought its way to Berlin, the heart of Hitler's Third Reich.

The remarkable spirit of co-operation quickly faded – as the common triumph in the last days of World War Two was replaced by the international tensions of the Cold War. Today – amid the unrest in the Ukraine – it seems far away from us. And yet its

distance makes it all the more important to remember and honour the achievement. Together, the West and Russia defeated the greatest menace twentieth-century civilisation would ever see. The recent commemoration of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holocaust – held on 27 January, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz – could not be a more powerful reminder of why we fought together.

Auschwitz was liberated by the Red Army. The Red Army paid the greatest price in the lives of its soldiers in its march to victory, and it also experienced the greatest horror. Soviet soldiers uncovered the first intact, fully functioning death camp – at Majdanek, near Lublin in Poland, on 23 July 1944. Political commissar Vasily Yeremenko, who entered the camp with the Soviet 2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Army, said bluntly: "When we saw what it contained we felt dangerously close to going insane." Similar emotions would be experienced by the Russian liberators of Auschwitz on 27 January 1945, and the British and American troops who subsequently freed Bergen-Belsen, Dachau and many more of these horror camps. The Nazi policy of mass extermination revealed there tells us why the Grand Alliance was so important.



Marshal Zhukov, Berlin, 1945 (SCRSS Library)

That alliance was forged from very different political ideologies and outlooks. The Soviet Union and the West never fully trusted each other. And yet, despite these suspicions, they achieved much, turning the tide of war ever more strongly against the Nazi state –

a co-operation symbolised by the great wartime summits at Tehran in November 1943 and Yalta in February 1945, when a map of postwar Europe was beginning to be drawn up. Difficulties and tensions were there also – most notably over the fate of Poland. The shadow of the Soviet advance westward, its desire for security, and the imposition of that security, on Poland, the Baltic States and the western Ukraine, created a deep sense of injustice amongst many of these peoples. For some, the war did not end in May 1945, and the fight for self-determination would continue. Its political repercussions are still being felt strongly today.

In this sense, VE Day marked a flawed triumph. But it was a massive triumph nevertheless. I consider these themes in my latest book, *After Hitler*, which looks at the last ten days of the war in Europe – from the death of the Führer in Berlin on 30 April 1945, to the signing of the second unconditional surrender at Karlshorst and the victory celebrations in Moscow on 9 May. These last few days are a story of mutual suspicion and a political crisis between the Allies, one largely hidden from public view. But it was a crisis that, in the short term at least, was successfully mastered. Whatever the problems in May 1945, remarkable goodwill between Russia and the West was also there.

Unconditional surrender was imposed on Nazi Germany through two signings, one at Rheims in northeastern France early on the morning of 7 May and a second at Karlshorst, in the suburbs of Berlin, late on the night of 8 May. The existence of these two treaties of surrender, and the fact that news of the first leaked out in the Western press in defiance of a news embargo, is the reason why Britain and America on one side, and Russia on the other, celebrate VE Day on different days.

The second signing did not come about through Soviet intransigence and foot-dragging – a suspicious view of Russian intentions that already presaged, or was subsequently influenced by, the descent into Cold War. The Soviet Union never actually

saw the draft of the first surrender at Rheims until after it was signed, and the Russian liaison officer present at that surrender put his name to it without Moscow's approval. The Soviet Union refused to accept the agreement as it stood, partly because it wished to strengthen one of its key clauses (German troops, eager to surrender to the Western Allies, were doing all that they could to avoid laying down their arms to the Red Army), more generally because – powerfully aware of the symbolic closure of the war – it wanted that ceremony held in Berlin, the centre of the Nazi regime, in the presence of Russia's most gifted commander, Marshal Georgi Zhukov. No Soviet citizen would have been satisfied with less.

The two ceremonies, at Rheims and Karlshorst, and the two VE Days that followed them, tell a story of differing outlooks and suspicion, but also one of goodwill and a willingness to work together to resolve those differences for a common cause. Today, it is a message we need to remember more than ever.

*Michael Jones is a fellow of the Royal Historical Society and a member of the British Commission for Military History. He has written books on the Battle of Stalingrad, the Siege of Leningrad and 'Total War: From Stalingrad to Berlin'. Dr Jones's most recent book, 'After Hitler: The Last Days of World War Two in Europe', is published by John Murray (January 2015).*

**Note:** Michael Jones will give a talk on *After Hitler* at the SCRSS on Friday 27 March (see page 7 for details).

## Book Reviews

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**Putin and the Oligarch: The Khodorkovsky-Yukos Affair**  
**By Richard Sakwa (I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2014, ISBN: 978 1 78076 4597, Hbk, 290pp, illus, index, £20.00)**

When Vladimir Putin came to power he was confronted by a bloc of business leaders

(oligarchs) so powerful that, collectively, they were able to control the Russian Parliament. The privatisation of public assets had been conducted under circumstances where effectively the privateers had made the laws legitimating the transfer of property to a dominant capitalist class. Consequently, the oligarchs claimed that seven of them controlled 50 per cent of the Russian economy, 70 per cent of the Moscow press and radio, and 80 per cent of national television. The Federal state was weak: it had entered into tax agreements with regions that diminished its financial basis, while non-payment of taxes by corporations was rife. Richard Sakwa's book considers one aspect of the consequences – the means by which President Putin secured state ownership and control of one of the largest Russian energy companies, Yukos. The book's focus is on its Chairman and CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky, once the richest man in Russia.

The author outlines Khodorkovsky's background, his rise to power via the early privatisations and purchase of energy interests through his Menatep bank. The major part of the book tells the story of his arrest, trial and imprisonment, and the transfer of Yukos's assets to the state. It covers the role of President Putin who is considered the major instigator of the actions to wrest control of Yukos from Khodorkovsky. There is an exhaustive discussion of the legal processes and the actions brought against the company's management. Khodorkovsky's trial is detailed, as is his time in prison where he reflects on his political and philosophical beliefs.

Sakwa makes it clear that, in his ascent to power, Khodorkovsky sought a leading political role. His financial power was used to secure political power. He presented a challenge to the Presidential administration and potentially to the state itself. One might say that there was an attempt to parallel the privatisation of the economy with a privatisation of the Russian Parliament and Government; in this Khodorkovsky had the support of powerful backers in the West,

particularly the neo-conservatives in the USA.

President Putin's response was to assert the power of the state through the use of legal processes. He did not revisit the privatisation process of the 1990s that lay at the root of the oligarchs' power and was the cause of widespread popular resentment. Putin did not put in question the legitimacy of the economic market and private property. His policy was to correct the ill effects of privatisation – not to reverse the process. He did not contend that Khodorkovsky's privatisation was illegal; rather the charges were that he (and others in the business community) had perpetrated fraud and, most importantly, had been a party to major acts of tax evasion. Legal opinion, marshalled in considerable detail by Sakwa, confirms that the process of his trials was faulty in many respects and converges on political motivations – a claim, nevertheless, denied by Putin.

The book is a detailed account of the trials, though many readers will find parts of it rather dense. It also dwells too much, perhaps, on Khodorkovsky's philosophical thoughts, which are not very original. Where it comes to life is in the discussion of the contrasting political outlooks of Putin and Khodorkovsky. Putin seeks to put in place a state-led system of market capitalism in which the state not only regulates but defines the social and political responsibility of the private sector. Khodorkovsky's position changed over time from robber baron to international philanthropist. The current and more mature Khodorkovsky seeks a pluralistic type of patriotic and democratic capitalism, based on private property, freedom and individual responsibility; and in this context the state is recognised as an instrument of modernisation. The book is the result of a tremendous research effort, based on original documents and interviews with many of the participants in the trial. The outcome is a thorough and sympathetic account of Khodorkovsky.

*David Lane*

## **An Accidental Relationship: Stories of the British in Tsarist Russia**

**By Roderick Heather (Austin Macauley Publishers Ltd, 2014, ISBN: 978-1-84963-586-8, Pbk, 322pp, £12.99)**

British experiences of Eastern Europe have been the inspiration for all three of Roderick Heather's books to date. *Russia from Red to Black* (Pen Press, 2011) was based on his own time in modern Russia, but now Heather has moved back to the area he focused on in his first book – pre-Soviet Russia and its vast empire. *The Iron Tsar* (Indenpress Publishing, 2010) detailed the life and achievements of one individual – John Hughes, the Welsh industrialist who founded Donetsk. In *An Accidental Relationship*, Heather provides high-level biographical accounts of a great number of the British people who spent time in the Russian Empire.

*An Accidental Relationship* reflects in its title the fortuitous introduction of travellers from the British Isles to Russia. In the mid-1500s, three ships sent to find a northern passage to China found themselves in Arctic Russia. Two failed to make it back, but Richard Chancellor's *Edward Bonaventure* returned safely with a letter to the English king from the Russian tsar and the promise of a significant new partnership.

Chance, then, started the relationship between Russia and Britain, but trade was its sustaining momentum: both in the traditional exchange of goods but also in the West-to-East transfer of skills. The vast majority of Heather's subjects came to Russia because they had experience of significant value to the tsars and their subjects, and *An Accidental Relationship's* chapters are largely organised by professions or skills. British visitors to Russia ranged from shipbuilders to governesses, architects to bankers, doctors to soldiers. Others were impelled by something other than Russian wages – one chapter is devoted to clergy and missionaries, for example, and another to travellers for pleasure.

The relationship between Russia and Britain was not always straightforward. British sojourners during the Crimean War are given their own chapter; few, of course, had a positive interest in their temporary home. At more peaceable times between the two major powers, some British figures instead moved to Russia to escape domestic strife – many Jacobite Scots, for example, were welcomed into the tsarist army.

As with so many modern publications, *An Accidental Relationship* would have benefited from more careful editing and proofreading, and its index could usefully have been expanded. Nevertheless, it provides an agreeable introduction, both light and detailed, to a subject most readers will only partially be aware of. The book includes a bibliography and several appendices, as well as a list of British companies in tsarist Russia.

Heather is at pains to show the great depth and long history of the British–Russian relationship, for example by including many stories of British families who stayed in Russia for several generations. The book came out, very appropriately, during the UK–Russia Year of Culture. The same year saw the publication of a bibliography that readers whose interest has been piqued by *An Accidental Relationship* might then turn to: Anthony Cross's *In the Land of the Romanovs* (Open Book Publishers), an annotated catalogue of over 1,000 English-language accounts of the Romanov-era Russian Empire.

*Mel Bach*

## **A Spy in the Archives: A Memoir of Cold War Russia**

**By Sheila Fitzpatrick (I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2014, ISBN: 978 1 78076 780 2, Hbk, 346pp, £22.50 – Pbk due March 2015)**

This is the memoir of a research student in Oxford and Moscow in the sixties, written up from diaries and letters. Sheila Fitzpatrick left Australia to embark on a PhD at St Anthony's College Oxford. She explains that

the careers of its tutors at that time had earned it the reputation of 'the spy college'; this is evidently the inspiration for the title of her book. The subject of her research was Lunacharsky, the Russian Marxist revolutionary and first Soviet Commissar of Education.

She missed out on a British Council student exchange place in Moscow in 1965 as she was an Australian without a British passport. This was remedied when she re-established contact with an Australian boyfriend with such a passport and they married the following year. In the interim she went on a student tour of Russia as an introduction to the country. She does not mention who ran the tour, but I wonder if this might have been Progressive Tours. "We felt like cosmonauts who had landed on the moon" is an early comment, which may resonate with those of us who recall our first visits to the Soviet Union, especially as students.

In 1966 the author was successful in taking up a place on a 10-month student exchange. There is much in the following detail that will be familiar to students and travellers in the Soviet Union. The anticipation of the first visit, pre-trip preparations and briefings, and encounters with daily life in the Soviet capital will be familiar to many of us. The process of approval for study plans and access to research materials may also be familiar to some. The author recounts the role of luck and persistence in her success in this respect.

Spying is largely a backdrop to the time. But there is a notable episode in which the author describes her encounter with a potential 'Romeo spy' from East Germany, which she seemed to escape deftly. The role of a Romeo spy was the seduction of women working in Western embassies with the aim of obtaining secrets.

The most successful chapter is 'Irina and Igor'. It deals with the author's friendships with Irina Lunacharskaya, the adopted daughter of Lunacharsky, and Igor Sats, his secretary and brother-in-law. She met both

in the course of her research and they both became enduring friends.

For those who pick up this book, it is worth persevering for the insight into the life of a foreign student in Moscow in the 1960s.

*Charles Stewart*

## **Nikolay Myaskovsky: The Conscience of Russian Music**

**By Gregor Tassie (Rowman and Littlefield, 2014, ISBN: 978-1-4422-3132-0, Hbk; ISSN: 978-1-4422-3133-7, ebook; £51.95)**

In the first half of the twentieth century Myaskovsky was enormously popular. Born in 1881, he had a ten-year start on his good friend Prokofiev and a quarter-century on Shostakovich, and his work was regularly programmed in the West. He was a perceptive critic (writing as 'Misanthrope') and encouraged Boris Asafiev on that path, but was repaid with betrayal at the 1948 Musicians' Conference, which condemned Myaskovsky as a composer of 'anti-people' music.

After his death in 1950 his stock fell. Svetlanov recorded all twenty-seven symphonies but none have entered the repertoire; a similar situation holds for the thirteen string quartets and nine piano sonatas, while the songs and other works are even more neglected.

Describing Myaskovsky as "the Conscience of Soviet Music", Tassie clearly hopes to rectify this injustice, but though he avoided many of the propaganda duties that fell to others, Myaskovsky did little to challenge the regime overtly. Perhaps this lack of an 'exciting political back-story' contributed to his falling profile as much as his undeserved reputation for writing gloomy, overly academic music.

The composer's friend and biographer Alexei Ikonnikov wrote a great deal on him and there is a substantial autobiographical article. But for many years the major Anglophone source was a 1946 translation

of Ikonnikov, and Tassie's book is the first full-length English-language study to be published since that. Tassie draws usefully on these, as well as some archival sources, and is successful to a degree, though the book suffers some serious drawbacks.

There is a structural oddity in that Myaskovsky's life is interleaved with descriptions of the major works, with the years of the Revolution and the war covered in a single chapter that races some way ahead, so that chapter 5 takes some confusing steps back in time.

While we have waited nearly seventy years for a full-length English study, there have been other sources. Prokofiev's diaries (translated by Anthony Phillips) throw much light, though some of the other (uncredited) translations here are not so idiomatic and even Myaskovsky's own 'voice' varies in tone. But, bizarrely, Tassie ignores the work of Durham University's Patrick Zuk, the West's major expert on the composer – an omission that extends even to the bibliography.

Most disappointingly, as Daniel Jaffe pointed out in the *BBC Music Magazine*, several sections are heavily dependent on Ikonnikov's 1946 book. Tassie's descriptions of the cantata *Kirov is With Us* and *Symphony No 22* are notably close to Ikonnikov, and there are several other cases where Tassie seems to have been unable to better Ikonnikov's adjectives. Another symptom is that Tassie's judgements sometimes contradict each other or the supporting evidence, as if he has not noticed the differing views in two sources. All this throws something of a shadow over the whole book.

Nevertheless, there is a useful work list and discography, and a good, if clearly selective, bibliography.

Myaskovsky's aesthetic rehabilitation is clearly one of Tassie's aims and perhaps the mere existence of the book will help. But while it lays out the facts, the judgements remain open to question.

The SCRSS Music Collection includes the following titles devoted to the composer:

Belza, Igor [Fedorovich], *Dvadtsat' pervaya i dvadtsat' sed'maya simfonii Myaskovskogo*, Moscow, Muzgiz, 1960

Ikonnikov, Aleksei A[leksandrovich], (trans Anon), *Myaskovsky: His Life and Work*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1946.

Ikonnikov, A[leksei Aleksandrovich], *Khudozhnik nashikh dnei: N.Ya. Myaskovskii*, Moscow, Muzyka, 1966

Kunin, I[osif Filipovich], *N.Ya. Myaskovskii*, Moscow, Sovetskii kompozitor, 1969

Shlifstein, S (ed.), *N.Ya. Myaskovskii: stat'i, pis'ma, vospominaniya*, Moscow, Sovetskii kompozitor, 1959

In addition, there are scores of piano, chamber and orchestral works, including *Symphony No 27*.

*John Riley*

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